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ABSTRACT

This document presents papers and other information from a 1-day conference that was held to address the issue of gender equity and lifelong learning in Ireland. The proceedings begin with a brief preamble, a summary of the welcome and introductions, and a summary and selected passages of the opening address by Willie O'Dea, the minister of state at the Department of Education and Science. Presented next are the texts of the keynote addresses "The Impact of Women's Community-Based Education" (Ailbhe Smyth) and "Gatekeepers of a Cold House--Reflections on the Masculinity in Crisis Debate" (Peadar King). An introduction by Maureen Kavanagh to the video "Invisible Movement: Best Practice in Women's Community Based Education" is presented along with the text of the paper "Celebrating Some Sameness" (Alan O'Neill). Concluding the proceedings is a report summarizing the main points regarding the following issues that were made at the workshops and plenary session: general issues on gender equality; funding; men's groups and networks; the school system; and the conferences' themes in the context of a strategic plan for lifelong learning in Ireland. The following items are appended: lists of participants and facilitators and rapporteurs; the full text of the speech by Peadar King, which includes 24 references; and the full text of Alan O'Neill's speech. (MN)

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ED 468 935

Celebrating Difference: Gender Equality and Lifelong Learning

Proceedings of the AONTAS Millennium Conference, Limerick Inn Hotel, Ennis Road, Limerick, Friday 20th October 2000

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Fiona McCauley,
Policy Support Worker/AONTAS
January 2001

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Preamble

In the thirty years since it foundation AONTAS has witnessed, supported and participated in the multi-faceted attempts of organisations, communities and individuals to create in Ireland the conditions necessary to make Lifelong Learning available to all. The speed of change in the last three years, in particular the unprecedented increase in resources to promote Lifelong Learning and the policies and structures puts in place as a result of the White Paper have presented new opportunities and challenges for AONTAS.

For the past ten years, through two NOW projects and the Women's Education Networks Development Initiative (WENDI), AONTAS has supported its women's groups and networks to develop as a strong and significant force for change. The research commissioned by AONTAS into the role of the women's community based groups in combating poverty and disadvantage documents their story and provides the basis for further development. The video documentary "Invisible Movement" powerfully illustrates the work of ordinary women and the difference they can make to themselves and their communities.

The success of the Women's Community Education movement and its prominence within AONTAS has contributed to the recognition of women's community-based education groups as key players in the field of adult education, thus highlighting the lack of similar developments to support marginalised men. Without a critical analysis of the spaces which men and women inhabit within a complex world and a recognition of the different types of support they require, this awareness has often been manifested in criticism of the success of women. Recent research by AONTAS into barriers to participation by men in education and training has uncovered a wealth of rich material relating to the changing role of men and to the difficulties faced by them. It has also allowed AONTAS to explore and get to know the emerging networks and groups of men working to address these issues.

At a policy level, the Department of Education and Science's Education Equality Initiative, which has emerged as a direct result of the success of the Women's Education Initiative, has presented an opportunity for groups to pilot innovative approaches to their work. The Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs also provide resources for development work to women's and men's groups and networks.

As a result of these developments AONTAS decided to address the issue of gender equality and Lifelong Learning as the theme for its Millennium Conference. Entitled 'Celebrating Difference', the conference aimed to:

- Examine the implications of the AONTAS research
- Profile models of good practice in men's and women's education
- Provide a forum for discussion and exchange of views and experience
- Draw out policy recommendations on the issue of gender equality
- Disseminate the outcomes of the conference.

The following report encapsulates the flavour of the conference, providing key issues arising from the Keynote Addresses, the plenary sessions and the workshops. It also draws out the main recommendations of the conference, which will inform the AONTAS Policy Document on Gender Equality and Lifelong Learning, which will be produced in 2001.

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Part One

Welcoming conference participants, particularly those from overseas, Sean Treacy, President of AONTAS, noted the important developments that had occurred within Irish Adult Education in 2000. Most significant of these, he said, was the publication of the government's White Paper on Adult Education, which had provided recommendations for much needed resources and a national structure for the sector. AONTAS, he said, had made a major input into the development of the White Paper through its consultation process and the publication of 'Making an Impact', the organisation's response to the Green Paper. Commending the membership and staff of AONTAS on its contribution to the formation of Adult Education policy, Mr. Treacy looked forward to a future where the expertise of AONTAS in relation to adult education would be central to the implementation of the aims of the White Paper. He also paid tribute to the Minister of State at the Department of Education and Science, Mr. Willie O'Dea, T.D. and his team in the Further Education Section of the Department, whose tireless efforts had brought the White Paper into being.

Mr. Treacy outlined the substantial recognition of the importance of Community Education within the White Paper and noted the considerable support given by AONTAS to this area of education. He referred to the impact of community education in addressing social and economic inclusion, particularly for women and marginalised communities. He welcomed the publication by AONTAS of "Men on the Move"; a research report into the barriers faced by marginalised men in accessing education and training opportunities and hoped that the future would see further developments allied to this work.

He then called upon the Minister of State, Mr. Willie O'Dea, T.D. to formally open the conference.

Opening Address by the Minister of State at the Department of Education and Science, Mr. Willie O'Dea, T.D.

The Minister of State commended the work of AONTAS in highlighting the effectiveness of Community Education models in targeting the most disadvantaged in society:

"The work of AONTAS in supporting Women's Groups and Networks, and of projects under the women's Education Initiative and European Community Initiatives, have pointed to the particular barriers faced by disadvantaged women in returning to learning. They have also highlighted the success of community education models in addressing such needs, and have shown the need for a strengthening of the role of the community sector in educational mainstream provision", he said.

Referring to the difficulty of attracting male returners into education and training, the Minister said:

"....the under-representation of men in the field tends to attract little attention. Male early school leavers outnumber females by 2:1, and perform less well in school examinations. Only 30% of participants on PLC courses and 27% on adult education and adult literacy programmes are males. The UCD study 'No Room for Adults' showed the typical mature student as being a female middle class student with no children who has already completed Leaving Certificate".

He went on to recognise the key barriers facing women wishing to return to learning:

"In regard to females, lack of childcare, Live Register access criteria for education and training programmes which militate against women in the home, isolation, the main burden of family responsibilities, sex-stereotyping of subject choice and gender roles, culturally inappropriate methodologies and materials, lower earning levels, the pre-dominance of casual part-time employment, poor career structures and under-representation in society's structures at decision-making levels have all been highlighted as posing challenges" He then referred to the key lessons of the Women's Education Initiative and how it has highlighted the processes of empowerment typical of community education.

He referred to a number of key initiatives being undertaken as a result of the White Paper which are based on the learning resulting from the WEI and AONTAS initiatives. These include:

- The advent of the Education Equality Initiative
- Dedicated funding for the community education sector under the Back to Education Initiative

- Representation of community education interests at national and local level on new adult education structures
- The appointment of 35 Community Education Facilitators to the Local Adult Learning Boards

"These projects, allied with the AONTAS research in this area, will be important in identifying the changes which need to be made to shape a more inclusive adult education system for the future", said Minister O'Dea.

He concluded by saying:

"This has been an exciting year for adult education...Today's conference is a further advancement of the agenda for change, and I look forward with interest to your deliberations".

The Minister of State then formally launched the research report ***"Men on the Move: A Study of the Barriers to Male Participation in Education and Training Initiatives"***, researched and written by Toni Owens and commissioned by AONTAS. He commented on the lack of research into the barriers faced by men, particularly long-term unemployed men, and said he hoped that AONTAS would continue to research the area in the future.

The Minister of State then formally opened the proceedings of the conference.

Keynote Addresses

The Impact of Women's Community-Based Education

Ailbhe Smyth

Ailbhe Smyth is the Director of the Women's Education, Research and Resource Centre (WERRC) at University College Dublin, where she is Senior Lecturer in Women's Studies. Since the centre was established in 1990, she has been instrumental in developing and directing a wide range of research and teaching programmes, including doctoral and other postgraduate degrees; an under-graduate evening degree; and the innovative Certificate in Women's Studies, an NUI accredited access course taught both on-campus and in outreach locations. The Certificate is designed and delivered in partnership with a variety of agencies, organisations and community-based groups throughout the country.

For many years, Ailbhe Smyth has been involved in educational policy development in a variety of capacities. Twice nominated as a member of the Higher Education Authority (1985-90 and 1995-2000), she is a founding director of the POWER Partnership and is active as a researcher, consultant and lecturer in women's education and gender equality. Her books and articles on feminist and gender-related themes have been widely published in Ireland and internationally. With WERRC colleagues, she has recently completed a major research project on women's community-based education as a means of combating poverty, commissioned by AONTAS.

AONTAS would like to thank Ailbhe Smyth for substituting at short notice for Ms. Inez McCormack, who was unable to attend due to illness. Unfortunately, because of these circumstances, a full paper by Ailbhe Smyth is not available to us.

In a lively and thoughtful address Ms. Smyth dealt with the inadequacy of the education system in providing access for women. Barriers to access disempowered women and prevented them from development. She explored the role of feminist thinking in empowering women to achieve equality and gave testament to her personal development as a feminist. She developed strong arguments for the provision of lifelong learning opportunities for women as a right in their quest for development and participation at a social, cultural and political level. She addressed issues of literacy, poverty and suicide. Her address also expressed concern at the way in which women's education and development through their own efforts is being compared in a competitive way to the work of the emerging men's groups:

"There is a perception among many statutory agencies and policy and decision-makers that women have 'got it made' so there is no great need to support gender-specific work by women's groups."

Ms. Smyth referred to a research project that was being undertaken by WERRC on behalf of AONTAS into the role of community-based women's education networks in combating poverty and disadvantage. The research revealed that the issues which prevented women from participating in

education and training opportunities ten years ago were still the same and that, while some resources had been put in place by various Departments, these are piecemeal and inadequate. While Ms. Smyth welcomed the recognition attributed to women's community education and the resources identified for this within the White Paper on Adult Education, she stated that women's groups were still experiencing difficulty in getting their work recognised and resourced. Women were also not represented in their own right on decision-making bodies. She concluded her address by challenging the policy-makers and providers to confront the issues facing women in a real way, with a view to achieving true equality.

Gatekeepers of A Cold House – Reflections on the Masculinity in Crisis Debate

Peadar King

Peadar King is a freelance researcher with an interest in gender politics. He has worked on a number of European gender projects through the nineties.

The following is a synopsis of Peadar King's address to the conference. A full paper is included in the Appendices.

Peadar King began by making a statement:

"The debate on men and the alleged crisis in men's lives has grown apace in recent times. Put simply, the debate is as follows: men, we are told, are in crisis and something needs to be done."

His paper reflected on that debate as it has unfolded over the last few years and identified critical issues to be addressed in the future. He contended that the debate itself is intrinsically linked with the debate that was initiated some decades ago about the position of women in Irish society.

King contended that there have been two main developments in the last decade:

- There has been a significant growth in men's groups right around the country.
- A public debate is now taking place in Ireland on the role of men in our society and, in particular, the claim that men are now in crisis.

"The central thesis now is that it is men who are in crisis and that women, if they have not already taken over the asylum, are in the process of doing so", he said.

He accepted that the 'crisis theory' is greeted with scepticism by many women and men, particularly in the context of men's continued dominance of practically all areas of public life. He went on to say:

"The debate between some representatives of the 'men in crisis' school of thought, and feminists who fought for the right to equal pay for equal work... and other advances, has been characterised by hostility, bitterness and some cynicism."

This, he asserted, has led to a polarisation of a new kind, where those deemed to be 'politically correct' by advocating the rights of minorities are regarded as a scourge. He believes that this polarisation has been furthered by the debate over levels of violence by women against men.

"This polarisation has intensified as the general consensus on the extent of violence against women by men has been challenged by a small number of commentators, who argue that the level of violence by women against men is on a par with the level of violence by men against women... These ideas have caught on and we need to think why have they caught on and what are the consequences of such mindsets. Such headlines are in marked contrast to what is generally known about domestic and other forms of violence both in this country and worldwide. The people who refuse to accept the view of the Gardaí or reports from authoritative sources like the United Nations say that incidents of domestic violence against men are under-reported. As if incidences of violence against women are not under-reported!"

He believes that this has led to an impression being created of men as victims:
"There is now the impression that men are the victims, that women have it all, that feminism has won out and that men are being more and more marginalised."

This attitude, he asserted, is primarily responsible for the current backlash against feminism. He also discussed the role of women in education, training and employment and pointed to the marked differences in course/career choice, attainment levels, promotional opportunities, salary scale and working conditions encountered by women and men.

King then discussed the reactions of men to the issues currently being debated. He noted the limited numbers of men who have actually made a contribution to the debate despite men's profiles in society. He questioned whether this is because they regard the debate as a non-issue, or whether they are afraid, defensive and in denial. He believes that current literature by men on men seems to point to the latter. In this context, he is critical of the adversarial nature of the debate in recent times:

"What is disappointing most of all about the public debate is its adversarial nature, is the unwillingness to listen to the experiences of the other and the other includes the experiences of women and the voices of men who do not conform to the siege mentality."

"In following the debate over the last three years, I have been struck by the comparisons between those who deny patriarchy, who now portray men as victims, and other dominant forces that are having difficulty coming to terms with change. It has to be said that Irish society was a cold house for Irish women, and men were the gatekeepers of that house. It is important for men to recognise this and to state it. It is in this context, then, that the issue of the position of men should be addressed."

King believes that men should recognise the nature and extent of patriarchy. He asserted that even those men who do not support patriarchy and its structures have benefited as a result of them. He enforced the view that the 'patriarchal dividend' is a reality and that it accrues to all men, even those who have been marginalised by other circumstances. He believes that a

recognition and acknowledgement of this should lead to a willingness to end patriarchal structures and to pursue the solution of power-sharing.
He stated that:

"If power-sharing is to be achieved it means that we have to become less defensive, more open and more willing to listen, more proactive in supporting our women partners in the home; and ensuring that our women colleagues in the workplace are actually treated as equal partners, and when they are left lagging behind, as they are in most public areas of life, that men actively become involved in ensuring that the horizontal and vertical impediments to progression are undermined. It is also important that women are not left with the emotional workload, people men turn to when we need support, but that men are available to provide that emotional support to women too and to other men. If acknowledgement of men's dominant role in society is the starting point, then the concerns and scepticism of many women alluded to at the outset of this paper may very well begin to dissipate."

He said, however, that the path is not likely to run smooth, and that many men will face difficult times in deconstructing a system which they have inherited rather than created.

"I think it is important to state that men who are interested in moving on from old models of society are not themselves responsible for the construction of patriarchy, but such men must ensure that we are not responsible for its maintenance or its reproduction. And that is difficult. [It] may very well include withdrawing from personal, social, political and promotional advancement to facilitate the advancement of women who made such sacrifices in the past for the men and children in their lives. To put it bluntly, how many men would forego their own personal advancement for the sake of their women partners or women colleagues in a kind of voluntary positive discrimination?"

King then went on to make a recommendation for the future, in order that the current stalemate is overcome and progress made:

Men and women should come together to deal with the difficulties which have arisen for both genders and have contributed to the current polarisation. In justification of his position he says:

"In this new setting, the pressing issues that many men face, like high levels of suicide, violence of all sorts, substance use/misuse, poor literacy, homelessness, early mortality, unemployment and poverty, can be tackled in a refreshing way." This, he believes, would "contribute not only to the liberation of women, (which is not to argue that the liberation of women is dependent on the goodwill of men), but to our own liberation as well."

King concluded by saying that change must come from the consciousness thought. "Self-education, school and community education are keys to overcoming denial and beginning the process of power sharing. Some of this work has started both in the formal second and third level, some in the informal sector. Much remains to be done."

Invisible Movement:

Best Practice in Women's Community Based Education

Screening of the video documentary "Invisible Movement" produced for AONTAS by Esperanza in 2000. Introduced by Maureen Kavanagh, Project Manager, AONTAS.

AONTAS has supported the work of women's groups and networks involved in the provision of community-based educational opportunities through the Women's Education Networks Development Initiative.

WENDI was funded under the Department of Education and Science's Women's Education Initiative. It drew to a close in February 2000 and AONTAS has secured funding to run a Women's Community Based Networks Support Project from 2001-2003.

As part of the evaluation of the WENDI Project and to demonstrate the outcomes of the work it engaged in, AONTAS commissioned Esperanza Productions to film a video documentary on the work of the women's groups and networks. The task was completed and the video launched in June 2000 in the presence of those women who made it possible. The documentary was screened on RTE on 13 June and received much critical acclaim.

The video, 'Invisible Movement' shows the practical application of best practice in relation to women's community-based education. It reveals the untold story of how Irish women, mainly those working in the home, have created what amounts to a kind of personal social revolution for themselves and the communities in which they live. It began very informally, small groups formed over tea and coffee in someone's kitchen, and advanced to the point where these groups are now being spoken of as the "Fourth Pillar" of the Irish educational system.

"Over the last fifteen years these women's groups, largely unseen, have made things change fundamentally for themselves. They tell their own story in this documentary and we went across the country from Moville to Tralee and Aranmore Island to Clondalkin to show that this is not just and urban or a rural phenomenon, but embraces the whole country." (Maureen Kavanagh)

"Invisible Movement may seem like a lofty title to some, but as the women reveal here, in terms of what they have managed to achieve for themselves, often with no support, it does not adequately emphasis the profound nature of what they have achieved." (Anne Daly)

The documentary was researched and produced by Anne Daly and Ronan Tynan of Esperanza. Copies are available for sale or on loan from AONTAS.

Celebrating Some Sameness

Alan O'Neill

Alan O'Neill started his first men's group in 1982 and since 1996 has been the co-ordinator of the South East Men's Network (S.E.M.N) and of its Men's Development Project, which is funded by the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs. The Men's Development Project is seeking change by, with and for men, especially men who are affected by marginalisation, disadvantage, unemployment and conditioning. The Network runs development groups for men in the South East with the aim of achieving better lives for the men, their families and communities.

Alan O'Neill began by talking of the similarities between women's and men's disadvantage and marginalisation and referred to the AONTAS research "Men on the Move", in which men echo the sentiments of many of the women interviewed in "Invisible Movement". He then began to outline the work of the South East Men's Network (S.E.M.N.) and the pioneering work it has carried out as a model of best practice for working with an evolving men's community education sector.

He went on to describe the work of the Network in promoting change for men. The S.E.M.N. employs four staff members, one of whom was recruited through a leadership training course run by the S.E.M.N. for young people.

The S.E.M.N. runs the Men's Development Project and works with about ten groups in the region in any year. The key, according to Mr.O'Neill, is that the staff have all come through the Men's Development process themselves, so have an affinity with the men they interact with.

"Rather than meet with men and say that we think they should do this or that, we are able to say that we have done this ourselves, it has been useful to us and we want to share it with you. We don't ask any men to do what we haven't done ourselves."

"The S.E.M.N is very much in the business of sharing and building an equality where, no matter what your background, you share what your life is really like."

The men's groups with which the S.E.M.N. are currently working are located all around the South East. Two groups are in Waterford, one catering for a mixture of middle and working class adult men and one which is a youth diversion project for young men. There is a group in Carrick-on-Suir, one in Knockenrawley in Tipperary town, a very successful group in Nenagh, where the S.E.M.N. is delivering a training course on running men's development groups. There is a group in Kilkenny and another in Carlow, and two in Wexford. One of these is a group for men with disabilities. Men who share particular life experiences are encouraged to form a group together to build solidarity with each other first, moving from there into the other groups.

The Men's Development Project, operated by the S.E.M.N. targets all men in order to build a sense of mutual co-operation and support. The project runs various events, including the National Men's Summer School, which usually takes place at the end of May. This gives the opportunity for men and men's groups from around the country to share experience, expertise, best practice and knowledge. There are about 200 men's groups in Ireland, and the Summer School provides a valuable chance to network.

The aim of the Men's Development Project is to achieve change in men, by men and with men, so that all men have better and more meaningful lives in a society that understands men's humanity. The long-term effect of achieving this goal will be better and more meaningful lives for men, women and young people, in a more humane society.

The Objectives of The South East Men's Network Men's Development Project are:

- Engage with men about the issues that arise in their lives.
- Assist men who are experiencing disadvantages due to unemployment, marginalisation, poverty, or men's conditioning, to overcome these disadvantages.
- Develop inclusiveness, equality and understanding among men.
- Explain what is known of the cultural and societal conditioning of men and check the soundness of this analysis against individual men's experience.
- Work with men to tackle the issues and the conditioning.
- Support men attempting to deal with change.
- Build confidence, self-esteem and self-respect in men.
- Empower men to build good relationships with themselves, each other, their partners, families, children, community and society.
- Train men to develop leadership, facilitative and co-operative skills.
- Have men take responsibility.
- Achieve change in men, by men and with men, and therefore in society.

Mr O'Neill then gave some examples of areas of work within the Project. He spoke of the difficulties of attracting men to engage with a men's group and the need for outreach strategies to encourage them in.

"We travel to resource centres, family resource centres, parish centres, parish halls, community centres, community development projects. We ask them if they have a plan and if so are men mentioned in it and if they are, can we come and meet with them? Men are often mentioned in plans these days but when we started out five years ago they were found under "the unemployed", not "men"."

He also spoke of the pivotal role played by women in encouraging men to attend their first men's group meeting.

"What we have noticed works well is when a woman encourages a man to go to a men's development group. The woman can say that there is a chance for

him to do some men's development work, there is going to be an introductory meeting at such a time in the centre, and how she would love him to go. She can also tell him that she thinks that he is a good man...

... If I ask him he may respond by saying yes and he may attend and that will be perfect. But alternatively the homophobia may come up for him. He may say yes and not appear on the night. Being asked and encouraged by a woman helps to avoid this happening. So women can be allies to men and a support to them."

Women can also be instrumental in encouraging a man to continually attend or to re-attend following a break from the group.

O'Neill cited the major effect of disadvantage on a man's self-esteem and self-confidence. The project helps to diffuse this effect by reinforcing self-worth and dissipating self-blame. They talk to men about the conditioning of men and debate it openly. O'Neill believes that this conditioning is reinforced by the celebration of successful men in the media.

"... in magazines, on T.V.; on the Late Late Show for instance. Men who have earned a lot of money or who are successful creatively and who have the expensive car and the house, and associate with female super-models, and all that sort of cliché. We can dismiss it as cliché if we want to, but working with unemployed men you will find that this is a value system that they recognise and are not part of. Their self-esteem and self-confidence is affected because they feel unsuccessful in this society that celebrates success. They also say that they feel as if the eyes of their partners and children are on them saying, "You are not a success". Of course they know that this is not actually happening. But there is a sense of having internalised this devaluation, the sense of not being valuable as a man."

Developing inclusiveness, equality and understanding about men from all classes, backgrounds, and abilities is an important feature of the project.

Men are invited to share in order to assist this process. As O'Neill says:

"Sharing has implications, especially if you are a man with access to more resources that others. There is a reflective realisation to be made when this man shares with men who are disadvantaged, unemployed or poor... He needs to look at how the society maintains economic inequality."

The process that the S.E.M.N uses is a developmental one. O'Neill's experience points to a two-year process between start-up and the full functionality of the group. Men are encouraged to talk about their interests, families and lives in order to build up confidence about sharing and this leads to a greater affinity with their colleagues in the group and points to the potential each man possesses.

O'Neill pointed to a number of issues which frequently emerge in the groups:

- Reluctance to deal with emotions, sharing of feelings and admission of vulnerability.

"The challenge is to create the safety for boys, young men, and adult men to admit the effects of the conditioning on us and the effects of events like that on us."

- Educational Disadvantage

Unemployed men who come into the groups often have low levels of educational attainment. They feel disenfranchised from the educational system and tell stories of a system lacking in support, encouragement and motivation for them.

- Self-esteem and self-confidence

Through a process of development within the groups, men learn skills of organisation, planning, consciousness raising and evaluation of processes and outcomes. Each event is taken as a learning opportunity. Men also learn to speak publicly about their experiences and feelings. All of this leads to a greater level of confidence and an acknowledgement of supports that are available on an individual basis.

- Gender equality

O'Neill addressed the issue of gender equality from the male perspective in the form of a narrative, taking the central characters of an unemployed man with a working wife. He talked of the feelings of anger and frustration which can build up around household duties, caring responsibilities and changing roles.

Men are encouraged to express their feelings in relation to gender issues and to make an analysis of them through social history in order to put things into a broader perspective. It also involves an analysis of men's conditioning in relation to work that has historically been the preserve of women.

O'Neill pointed out that men feel that they do not have the skills necessary to perform childcare and household duties well, reinforcing feelings of low self-esteem. He believes that the main challenge is to skill men to be competent in these roles, which would lead to a greater sense of value being attributed to them. He is also encouraged to think about the future he would envisage for his children and how he can contribute to shaping it.

- Embarrassment

Embarrassment can be a huge barrier to men's personal development and manifests itself through feelings of low-self esteem. Through personal development it can be challenged and overcome. Sharing of feelings of embarrassment and the causes of it within the group greatly assist men in attaining their potential and personal goals.

O'Neill informed the conference that the S.E.M.N has recently been included in the Educational Equality Initiative and will, in 2001, be able to offer educational opportunities to the men who are part of the Men's Development Project.

He concluded by saying:

"It's really liberation that we should be talking about. At the end of the day, what is our society going to be like and how are we going to share the resources? How are we going to make it humane for all of us? I think that the ultimate goal of the South East Men's Network is Men's Liberation.

Luckily, the liberation of one group in isolation is impossible. The only way that liberation will be successful for men, is when it includes the liberation of women and young people."

Report of the Workshops and Plenary Session

AONTAS would like to thank all those who facilitated, participated in and acted as rapporteur for the conference workshops.

Ms. Berni Brady, Director of AONTAS, chaired the Plenary Session. The panel comprised Mr. Peadar King, Mr. Alan O'Neill and Ms. Brid Connolly of the Centre for Adult and Community Education, NUI Maynooth.

The following notes represent the views of participants as noted during the workshops and plenary sessions. They are outlined under a number of headings, which assist in formulating a cross-representation of all workshops, which took place concurrently.

The workshops were designed to assist in the formulation of an AONTAS Policy Series document on Gender Equality and Lifelong Learning. The facilitators were asked to guide the discussion by posing a number of questions to their respective groups. These questions were:

1. What is your initial response to the inputs you heard this morning?
2. Is there anything that surprised you?
3. What elements would you like to see included in a gender equality policy document?

General Issues on Gender Equality

Equality is a universal issue, of which gender equality is but one aspect. While the focus of this conference was gender equality, it is important to be aware of other areas of inequality and how these can be addressed. Particular areas of concern are the rights of members of the travelling community and ethnic minorities, people with disabilities, older adults and those living in situations of poverty and disadvantage. Thus, an holistic approach to gender equality as part of an underpinning social philosophy is important.

Gender Equality was described as a 'thorny subject' due to the various points of view, and the tensions of the debate were addressed as an issue. It was felt, however, that men had been on the fringes of the gender equality debate for some time and that there is now a need to include men in solving the problems associated with gender inequality and in the dialogue on gender issues while, at the same time, not losing track of women's issues as distinct issues in the gender equality debate. Following considerable discussion on the subject, it was agreed that it was appropriate for AONTAS to conduct research and work in the area and to promote it as an issue at national level.

Job-related training was identified as an area which should include gender equality training in order to address such issues as bullying, harassment and other gender-related difficulties within the workplace.

The following were identified as necessary supports:

- The necessity of flexible supports to facilitate lifelong learning, such as modularisation, Accreditation of Prior Learning and Credit Accumulation and Transfer Systems, combined with clear progression routes for learners;

- The absolute necessity of childcare and eldercare facilities in order to enable access

- The need for paid educational leave, which, it was felt, should be legislated for in line with other EU states. It was highlighted that the low-paid, low skilled workers could reap substantial benefit from such a measure.

Funding

There was wide support for the view put forward by Ailbhe Smyth in her address that funding to date has been minimal and that the amounts outlined in the White Paper on Adult Education through the Back to Education Initiative will be insufficient to support the work being done.

- Funding for the community education sector needs to move from poor to good with clear funding mechanisms.

- There is also a need to move from short-term, pilot funding to mainstream or core funding. This is necessary to enable medium to long-term planning. It is also necessary to reduce the current unhealthy climate of competitive funding which leads to a reluctance to share information and other resources.

- Integrated supports, to include childcare/eldercare, transport and outreach services, should be an integral part of all funding mechanisms.

- It was suggested that more resources for community education could be made available through the VECs.

- There is also a need for co-ordinated mechanisms and more co-operation between funding agencies, particularly in relation to the amount of bureaucracy faced by groups attempting to access funding.

- The cost of delivering education within the community and voluntary sector needs to be carefully examined and costed.

- The emerging men's groups should be assisted and supported to develop community education strategies for their groups.

Supports

There is a wealth of research available on lifelong learning and related issues, both nationally and internationally. Workshop participants felt, however, that there was a need to strengthen this qualitative research with accurate and scientific statistical data. Only through the collection of such data would necessary resources become available.

- To fully address the issue of gender equality, a change in attitude and mindset will be necessary at all levels of the system and society. Only in this way will diversity of opinions be respected. It was felt that AONTAS had a role to play in relation to changing this mindset through leadership by example.

- There is a need for social and political training in order to progress policy issues at local level so that local needs and issues inform national policy.

- Family-friendly policies need to be put in place in order to provide lifelong learning. There are existing models of good practice in this regard and they should be developed to create opportunities for intergenerational learning. This is especially necessary in areas of socio-economic disadvantage.

- AONTAS should further research strategies for learning, especially for men. The research report Men on the Move is a step in the right direction, but needs to be crystallised by the development of policy in this area.

- Strategies should be developed to facilitate equality of access for all, regardless of gender. The needs of other disadvantaged sectors of the community were cited in this regard. Links should be created with organisations working with these specific groups to examine their education needs and progress the debate on their issues.

- National policy should reflect the value of education for social and personal development rather than focus on an employment or economic agenda.

Representation

- National gender balance policy has been in existence for quite some time and stipulates a 60/40% ratio at minimum. The policy must be enforced at all levels of the system.

- Groups need to access resources for representational capacity building, open to both genders.

- Groups should be able to access gender equality training in order to be able to implement national policy.

Mechanisms

Gender Equality training within statutory agencies is necessary to ensure that issues are addressed within local, regional and national policies. This takes on increased importance given the current changes at local government level, including the extension of the National Anti-Poverty Strategy to local authority level and the establishment of Special Policy Committees and other committees.

Quotas will not be effective without equalising the power-base on representative and decision-making structures.

The following were suggested as ways of progressing the debate:

- The establishment of a men's sub-committee of AONTAS.
- The monitoring of funding and policy implementation to ensure gender equality, possibly by convening a high-level group to monitor the recommendations outlined in the White Paper.
- The building of alliances and partnerships in order to shift the current power base, and realise the change of mindset required to ensure true gender equality, will be important.
- The promotion of more formal training of adult education practitioners, examining issues such as numbers of educators to be trained, quality of the training, perceptions of quality from the providers and others and methodology should all be examined.
- Data should be gathered relating to men's groups and the educational content of their programmes.
- An AONTAS gender equality policy should be based on broad principles, not just based on education
- AONTAS should continue to build strong links at community level.

The issues of access, progression, transfer and modes of learning all featured largely in the debate. It is clear that it is necessary to actively address issues of access. AONTAS recognises that this is being given priority at governmental level through the establishment of the Taskforce on Lifelong Learning, the Action Group on Access the Third Level and the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland. The conference showed that the main areas of concern are:

- The development of alternative methods of assessment
- The development of systems to accredit prior and experiential learning

- The development of credit accumulation and transfer systems

- Developing mechanisms to accredit learning in the workplace

- The development of flexible learning structures, including modular and outreach programmes

- The development of clear progression routes for learners

Men's Groups and Networks

A statement was made during the conference alluding to "men in crisis". It was felt, however, that men were not in crisis but in a stage of growth and development which should be welcomed and encouraged. It was felt that men's groups needed support and encouragement in order to build up community education strategies for their members.

- It was good to hear men's perspectives on the issue of gender equality in education. It is important to appreciate the respective roles of men and women, to address the issue of absence of role models, particularly in schools and the workplace, and to examine whether enough is being done to address gender equality issues in the early years.

- There was surprise at the description of male violence and the way in which it is being put on the agenda as a gender equality issue. It was suggested that this was a backlash to the issues of violence against women and the work of feminists and women's groups in general.

- The learning patterns of men must be further researched in order to fully address their needs. The men's groups are of great benefit in that they are grassroots, needs-based groups. Men want to learn by doing and this needs to be recognised as a legitimate learning need. Men are also not as inclined to attend evening courses, an issue that needs to be addressed. Strategies for good practice must be developed in relation to the learning needs of men.

- The need for autonomy within men's and women's groups was addressed. It was felt that, while autonomy is very important for both genders, that there was a need for single sex groups to meet together occasionally to discuss issues of mutual concern.

The School System

- Gender equality programmes such as Exploring Masculinities need to be marketed effectively to ensure sufficient uptake to create a difference.

- Given the absence of male role models within the education system, teachers should be appointed to schools on a gender-balanced basis. Not enough is being done at first-level to address issues of gender equality and that this is a gap which needs to be filled.

Conclusion

Viewed in the context of the AONTAS Strategic Plan, A Vision for the Future, and the new Draft Strategic Plan being developed to cover the period 2001-2004, many of these themes are being addressed.

- Communication has been established between AONTAS and many of the men's groups and networks and they have been identified as a group whose needs can be supported in the context of the new Strategic Plan.

- The creation of strategic linkages has been a key feature of 'A Vision for the Future' and is constantly being reviewed by AONTAS. It is through the development of partnerships and participation in decision-making structures that AONTAS primarily furthers the issues of concern to its membership. These partnerships include those at community level, and AONTAS has secured funding to further support the work of those women's groups and networks involved in the provision of community-based learning opportunities for the duration of the next strategic plan.

Appendix 1: Participant List

Allen, Isobel	Gorey Youth Needs
Bane, Liam	Co. Dublin VEC
Barry, John	Adult Education Training College
Bates, Maureen	Rowlagh Women's Group Limited
Beirne, Séan	Co. Roscommon VEC
Blackmore, Liz	Tuam Resource Centre
Bolger, Liam	The South East Men's Network Limited
Bourke, Noel	Co. Offaly VEC
Brannigan, Ann	Ballyphenane/Togher Community Development Project
Brennan, Maureen	Ossory Youth
Brophy, Eimear	Co. Limerick VEC
Browner, Helena	LYCS,
Byrne, Denise	ACCESS 2000 (Wexford) Limited
Byrne, Gene	Co. Roscommon VEC
Cahill, Breda	Western Women's Link
Casey, Gill	ACCESS 2000(Wexford) Limited
Cleary, Mary T.	A.M.E.N.
Clinton, Mary	ACE & RAVE Network
Conboy, Patricia	City of Limerick VEC
Condon, Maureen	Co. Cork VEC
Conlan, Sean	Co. Clare VEC
Connell, Paul	Longford U.D.C.
Connolly, Brid	Centre for Adult & Community Education
Conway, Mary	Tralee Women's Resource Centre
Corridan, Mary	Dublin Adult Learning Centre
Coughlan, Dermot	University of Limerick
Cregan, Cora	St. Patrick's College
Cribben, Raymond	Co. Laois VEC
Crowe, William	Co. Limerick VEC
Cullinane, Susan	Network Kildare
Cummins, Len	
Daly, Marie	Rowlagh Women's Group Ltd.
Davis, John	Draíocht
Deedigan, Pat	Southill Integrated Development Project
Dempsey, Lucy	One Parent Exchange and Network
Diffely, Tony	
Dillon, Kathi	Network for Educational Support Tuam Area
Dillon, Annie	WERRC
Dinan, Ann	C.M.C.S.S.
Dolan, Anne	Mary Immaculate College
Dollard, Michael	Co Westmeath VEC
Donnelly, Jacinta	Rowlagh Women's Group
Donoghue, Bernie	Co. Leitrim Partnership
Doogan, Margaret	Inchicore College
Dowd, Marian	Kilkenny Childcare Steering Group
Doyle, Liam	LYCS,
Duffy, Bernadette	Network Kildare
Dunne, Susan	
Egan, Pat	Cork Adult Education Council
Egan, Mike	DCU/Centre for Lifelong Learning
English, Fiona	Wexford Area Partnership
Ennis, Pauline	ACCESS 2000(Wexford) Limited
Fahy, Patricia	Sisters of Mercy
Feery, Joe	Co. Offaly VEC

Feighan, Frank	Co. Roscommon VEC
Fitzgerald, Noel	Draíocht
Flannery, Marian	Women of the North West
Fleming, Christy	Ballymun Men's Centre,
Flynn, Brian	Department of Social Community and Family Affairs
Fox, Michael	Co. Offaly VEC
Frawley, Rita	Co. Offaly VEC
Furlong, Marguerite	Co. Wexford Partnership
Gallagher, Martha	
Gallagher, Crona	Co. Donegal VEC,
Gannon, Maureen	
Gannon, Thomas	Westside Community Resource Centre
Gavin, Micheal	ELAH Voluntary Counselling Services
Geraghty, Carmel	CDVEC
Gilmartin, Francis	Co. Leitrim V.E.C.
Glancy, Christopher	Co. Carlow V.E.C.
Glennon, Brian	Old Bawn Community School
Glover, M.	S.W.K.A.
Goggin, Wendy	Southill Integrated Development Project
Golden, Jane	North Leitrim Women's Resource Group
Goulding, Fred	Co. Dublin VEC
Halpin, Sean	Dept of Social Com & Family Affairs
Hamilton, Mary	City of Limerick VEC
Harney, Clare	Finglas Cabra Partnership
Harvey, Eric	Knockanrawley Men's Group
Healy, Michael	Co. Limerick VEC
Hearne, Rose	Local Employment Service
Herraghty, Marietta	Second Chance Education Programme for Women
Hickey, Maureen	Portlaoise Women's Group
Hogan, Carmel	A.M.E.N.
Hurley, Leonard	Equality Authority
Hurley, Christine	Tallaght Local Employment Service
Hurley, Kevin	University College Dublin
Kavanagh, Larry	Co. Laois VEC
Kavanagh, Mary Hilda	I.V.E.A.
Kavanagh, Noleen	North West Inner City Women's Network
Kearney, Maura	R.A.V.E.
Kearns, Miriam	Resource Centre
Keating, Jean	University College Dublin
Keaveney, Niamh	Clondalkin Women's Network
Kehelly, Mary	City of Limerick VEC
Kelly, Diana	Dublin Institute of Technology
Kennedy, Patricia	Limerick Adult Learner Support Service
Kennedy, Margaret	St. Vincent De Paul
Keogh, Helen	Department of Education & Science
Kerrane, Maura	City of Limerick VEC
Kiernan, Victor	Longford County Council
Kirby, Mary	Forum Women's Working Group
LaCumber Bridie	Portlaoise Women's Group
Joesphine, Lally	West Training & Development Ltd.
Langford, Eamonn	Iveragh Information Technology Training Ltd
Larkin, Connie	Department of Education & Science
Lenihan, Liam	Teachers' Union of Ireland
Leonard, Miriam	Dublin Corporation Public Libraries
Love, Patrick	North Leitrim Men's Group
Lynch, Mairead	South West Kerry Women's Association
Lynne, Mary	South Kerry Development Partnership

Mannion, Breda	Mayfield CALP
Mawson, Lesley	St. Patrick's Women's Group
Mac Lochlainn, Sean	Co. Galway VEC
McCarthy, Theresa	Ballyphenane/Togher Community Development Project
McCarthy, Frank	Old Bawn Community School
McCarthy, Catherine	University of Limerick
McDermot, Richard	Liberties Men's Group
McDonagh, Jarlath	Co. Galway VEC
McGee, Gerry	Co. Leitrim VEC
McGill, Rosemarie	An Cosán
McGivern, Deirdre	Co. Meath VEC
McGlynn, Frank	A.M.E.N.
McGrath, Mary	Southill Community Development Project
McGrath, Jacqui	Network Kildare
McGurk, Maura	A.M.E.N.
McKenna, Monica	Draíocht
McMahon, Jacinta	Clondalkin Women's Network
McMorrow, Mia	Co. Leitrim Partnership
McNamara, Valarie	C/o. Mayfield Community Development Project
McNamee, Gerry	TARGET
McNamee, Marie	TARGET
Meagher, Noreen	Tipperary Women's Networking Group
Meagher, Aine	Weight Watchers
Meehan, Tina	Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs
Mitchell, Gerry	North Tipperary Community Services
Molloy, Brian	Francis Street Community Education Centre
Moody, Dick	Waterford Institute of Technology (W.I.T.)
Moohan, Angela	Community Learning Scotland
Moore, Patricia Anne	University of Limerick
Morgan, Berna	Clare Women's Network
Morgan, Kate	Second Chance Education Project for Women
Morgan, Mary	
Murphy, Julie	Ballyphenane/Togher Community Development Project
Murphy, Tom	City of Waterford VEC
Murray, Frances	R.A.V.E.
Nolan, Albert	Knockanrawley Men's Group
Nolan, Patrick	Co. Wexford VEC
O'Brien, Margaret	Women Together Tallaght Network
O'Brien, Loretta	
O'Brien, Geraldine	Ballynanty Family Resource Centre
O'Carroll, Valerie	North West Inner City Women's Network
O'Connell, Eva	Cork Adult Education Council
O'Connor, Carmel	South West Kerry Women's Association
O'Connor, Douglas	Co. Westmeath VEC
O'Dowd, Siobhan	Marino Institute of Education
O'Foiréis, Brian	Galway Adult Literacy Group
O'Hanlon, Nora	Network Kildare
O'Kelly, Michael	Co. Limerick VEC
O'Leary, Ann	Local Employment Service
O'Loughlin, Jim	Cork Adult Education Council
O'Riordan, Jacqui	Higher Education Equality Unit
O'Rourke, John	The South East Men's Network Limited
O'Rourke, Trish	
O'Toole, Sorcha	Forum North West Connemara Rural Project
O'Toole, Carol	Gorey Youth Needs Group/Women's Development Group
Phelan, Kieran	Co. Laois VEC
Redmond, Angela	Women Together Tallaght Network

Rice, Ronan	Co. Laois VEC
Richardson, Samantha	W.I.T. Students Union
Roche, Lorna	PAUL Partnership
Ronayne, Mary	Carlow Women's Aid
Ryan, Patrick	Francis Street Community Education Centre
Ryan, John	AONTAS
Ryan, Frances	IVEA
Shanahan, Shivaun	Tuatha Chiarraí
Shaw, Vera	St. Patrick's Women's Group
Sheehan, Clare	Clare Women's Network
Sheehy Skeffington, Micheline	
Simons, Paddy	Ballymun Men's Centre
Slaven, Ann	Wexford VTOS
Sloan, Gary	Open University in Ireland
Smartt, Emily	Clondalkin Women's Network
Smeaton, Alastair	Dublin Corporation Public Libraries
Smith, Ruth	Tipperary Women's Networking Group
Spring, Noelle	The Katharine Howard Foundation
Stapleton, Nora	Irish Country Women's Association
Tichelmann Thomas	N.C.D.E.
Theessen, Johann	Heimvolkschochschule Stephansstift
Treacy, Sean	AONTAS
Tuthill, Annette	Family Resource Centre, St. Munchins
Wall, Patricia	Ministeries Development Group
Whelan, David	The South East Men's Network Limited
Wheatley, Mary	Co. Laois VEC
Williams, Veronica	Tallaght Partnership
Wims, Owen	Co. Kildare VEC

Appendix 2:
List of Facilitators and Rapporteurs

Facilitators

Gerry Mitchell

Sean Conlon

Brid Connolly

Susan Dunne

Len Cummins

Maura Kerrane,

Michael O'Mahony

Rapporteurs

Susan Cullinane

John Barry

Loretta O'Brien

Mike Egan

Fiona Lawler

Marietta Herraghty

Margaret Purcell

Appendix 3:
Full Text of Speech by Peadar King

The debate on men and the alleged crisis in men's lives has grown apace in recent times. Put simply, the debate is as follows: men, we are told, are in crisis and something needs to be done.

This paper will attempt to reflect on that debate as it has unfolded over the last few years and, in the process, attempt to identify critical issues that need to be addressed in the future. The debate itself is intrinsically linked with the debate that was initiated some decades earlier about the position of women in our society. It is one of the central figures in that debate here in Ireland that I wish to take as the starting point for the remainder of this paper.

Writing in the Irish Times in the early 1990s and reproduced in her book "Are You Somebody?" Nuala O'Faoláin described going for a walk to her local swimming pool at 8 o'clock in the morning. She described her encounter as follows:

> *Going down past McDonald's I saw a woman, surrounded by children. She was a small woman, and the children were very small. I counted them - six little girls, and the baby she was carrying looked like a boy. The older children were laden down with bags and bundles. A duck and her ducklings.*
>
> *I could guess what this little troupe were doing on the street, but the woman told me anyway. They'd run away from the caravan they live in at first light. Her husband had been beating her. You could see the bruises.*
>
> *I don't know why that man beat up that woman I met. I don't suppose he knows either. I don't suppose she knows. And above all, I don't suppose that the children know. But they were there when it happened. They were learning. So that's seven more small human beings who have seen with their own eyes that brute violence makes things happen ... look at the extent of what those children have lost. Theirs is innocence ruined, even though their mother is so brave.*

O'Faoláin was both moved and angered by the encounter and she went on in her article to pose the following question:

> *"Why does no man take responsibility for his brothers?"*
> *(O'Faoláin: 303: 1996)*

In the intervening decade there have been two main developments. There has been a significant growth in men's groups right around the country. I should say at the outset that I am not involved in one, so I am not going to focus on this development. You will hear later in the day from Alan O'Neill on these developments.

The second development, and the one this paper concerns itself with, is the more public debate taking place in Ireland on the role of men in our society and, in particular, the claim recently endorsed by Anthony Clare in his "ON MEN: Masculinity in Crisis" book, that men are now in crisis. The central thesis now is that it is men who are in crisis and that women, if they have not already taken over the asylum, are in the process of doing so.

Given men's continued dominance of practically all areas of public life, not only in this country, but in the western world and globally, the assertion that men are now in crisis is greeted, not surprisingly, with a mixture of scepticism and outright disbelief by many women, particularly feminist women and by many men. The debate between some representatives of the "men in crisis" school of thought, and feminists who fought for the right to equal pay for equal work, for access to the labour market, for the right to control their own fertility and other advances, has been characterised by hostility, bitterness and some cynicism. In a tetchy exchange in the Irish Times on 28 July 1997, Nuala O'Faoláin wrote as follows: "I flinch when male columnists write about what they often sneeringly call feminism. Wouldn't you think," she rhetorically goes on to say, "decent men, aware of their privileges, would welcome the advances some women have made in this century?" In response John Waters accused O'Faoláin of an "assault (in) the form of a flimsy necklace of presumption, assumption, assertion and statistics" (August 5, 1997). In the exchange each accused the other of "intellectual shoddiness".

A new polarisation has emerged. In some instances, the debate has degenerated into name calling with the term "political correctness" being the currency of abuse. Invariably it is used in a pejorative and disparaging way. People who are perceived as politically correct are the new pariahs, with one well known broadcaster concluding that political correctness is "one of the greatest scourges of modern times". Left wing pinkos and creeping Jesus take note! Apparently, to advocate rights for minorities, for those who are powerless, undermined and excluded, is regarded as one of the greatest scourges of modern times - more so than the prevalence of global mass poverty, racism, environmental destruction and general human exploitation.

This polarisation has intensified as the general consensus on the extent of violence against women by men has been challenged by a small number of commentators, who argue that the level of violence by women against men is on a par with the level of violence by men against women. Writing in the Irish Times on September 4 2000, John Waters stated that "every independent (sic) study in the Western world surveying men and women has found that domestic violence is roughly a 50 – 50 phenomenon". How one establishes that a study is 'independent' is a moot point.

These assertions are not confined to one columnist or to one newspaper. On September 13 1998, The News of the World carried a story on the "Secret Hell of Ireland's Battered Husbands". On 29 January 1998, The Star newspaper headlined "Beaten, Stabbed: The Violence Men Suffer at the Hands of Women". Pat Flanagan, writing in the Sunday Mirror on 15

November 1998, states that "startling new statistics show that Irish men may (sic) be suffering more domestic violence than women". In Belfast, Ian Starrett of the News Letter declared that "throughout Northern Ireland and the Republic, men are suffering from vicious female wrath" (20 January 1999). In The Examiner, (22 September 1998) Deirdre O'Flynn reports that "the breakdown in gender roles has led to an upsurge in violence by women". Peter Curran in the Irish Independent wrote about "the women who beat up their men" on 17 July 1998. Áine de Paor in The Sun newspaper 1 March 1999, tells us that 3,500 men live in fear of violent wives or girlfriends in this country. On December 11 1998, Patsy McGarry wrote a piece in the Irish Times under the heading "feminists accused of suppressing truth about battered husbands". These ideas have caught on and we need to think why have they caught on and what are the consequences of such mindsets.

Such headlines are in marked contrast to what is generally known about domestic and other forms of violence both in this country and world-wide. A cursory glance at the Irish Times on Friday 15 September 2000 revealed the following:

- A White Dublin man was convicted under the Prohibition on Incitement to Hatred Act
- A young Dublin man assaulted an Aer Lingus duty manager on an aircraft
- A man held following a shooting incident
- A young woman felt "very disturbed and upset" after a meeting with two senior male employees in one of the State's largest health agencies
- A sexual harassment case in the White House
- A 14 year old boy assaulted a Garda
- Another 14 year old found guilty of twice raping a 15 year old girl while a gang of his pals looked on.

And this is just one's day coverage. Seven stories dealing with male aggression and violence.

The Community Relations Section of the Garda Síochána published a small leaflet on domestic violence recently and in the opening line they say that, in most cases, women are the victims of what they call "these shattering crimes".

Outside of Ireland, the figures for domestic violence illustrates the same pattern – men are more like to perpetrate violence against women than the reverse. A World Bank analysis (quoted in the United Nations "Challenge to the Year 2000"), for example, reports that 35 recent studies from industrialised and developing countries show that one quarter to one half of all women have suffered physical abuse from an intimate partner, and this abuse cuts across education, class, income and ethnic boundaries.

The recent report from UNFPA spells out in graphic detail the reality of global violence against women. At least one in three women, the report states, has been beaten, coerced into sex or abused in some way – most often by

someone she knows. One woman in four is abused during pregnancy. Two million girls are coerced into the sex market each year. Events that may trigger violent responses include not obeying the husband, talking back, refusing sex, not having food ready on time, questioning the man about money or girl-friends or going somewhere without his permission (UNFPA 2000: 3-4).

The people who refuse to accept the view of the Gardaí or reports from authoritative sources like the United Nations say that incidents of domestic violence against men are under-reported. As if incidences of violence against women are not under-reported! The assertion that men are as likely to be victims of domestic violence is in fact a travesty of the truth. The sad reality for men is that we are more likely to be injured or killed by other men than we are by women and distortions of that truth will never advance the cause of addressing that reality. And for everyone's sake, we need to address that reality.

There is now the impression that men are the victims, that women have it all, that feminism has won out and that men are being more and more marginalised. Patriarchy may not yet be dead but, to borrow a phrase from Pink Floyd's Dark Side of the Moon, "far away across the fields the tolling of the iron bell" can be heard heralding its imminent demise. Anthony Clare in his book tells us that "beneath the surface male power is being subverted" (p. 4). If men listen, Clare tells us, they can hear the "tumbrels lumbering up the avenues and the masses calling that their (men) time is up" (p. 69). Writing in the "Irish Times" on 17 February 1998, John Waters tells us that the men who run the "Irish Times" are "the last generation of men in power". In response, men are being asked to rally round to confront the so called misandry, or hatred of men, that has supposedly afflicted our society and what Waters calls "the propaganda which makes possible their (men's) marginalisation" (12 January 1999).

Anthony Clare informs us that "in this feminist revolution, male power is being overthrown. Men, like colonists seeing their empire crumble, don't like what is happening" (2000:4). He asserts that "employers discriminate in favour of younger people and women instead of men" (2000:89) To argue this is to overstate what feminism has achieved and to exaggerate the extent to which male power and supremacy has been challenged. This overstatement is the basis of the current backlash against feminism. For example Clare's belief that employers discriminate in favour of women does not stand scrutiny unless one is talking about the secondary labour market of low paid temporary employment. The trajectory of men's careers still exceeds that of women, as for example the employment pattern in the Irish civil service, the judiciary, the Oireachtas, trade unions, legal and medical professions, business and management, universities and training colleges indicate.

The academic world, which Clare straddles, is a case in point. In seven universities and two teacher training colleges, 95% of the professors are men and 5% are women. 94% of associate professors are men and 6% are women. 82% of senior lecturers are men and 18% are women. 70% of

lecturers are men and 30% are women. 54% of assistant lecturers are men and 46% are women and in the lowest paid category of all, junior lecturer 47% are men and 52% are women – the only area where women outnumber men. (Employment Equality Agency 1999)

The significance of this imbalance for future generations of Irish graduates can be seen in a recent report from the Higher Education Authority that indicates that men are more likely to get first class honours than are women. A press release on 18 September 2000 states that:

> "figures from a forthcoming Higher Education Authority report show that female students are far less likely than their male colleagues to achieve first class honours For example, despite outnumbering men by a ratio of 3:2 in one university, women account for just 1 in 3 of the top degrees awarded by that institution".

The Union of Students in Ireland, in pointing to the large number of male lecturers asks: "is this gender imbalance a contributory factor in female under-performance? This under-performance must have implications for prospects in the employment field, apart altogether from the injustice of it all.

In reflecting on the debate that has unfolded over the last few years, I am struck by how few men have actually contributed to it, this despite the number of high profile men in a cross-section of fields. To what extent this indicates that this is a non-issue for them, I am not sure. And as an observer of that debate I get the distinct impression that fear, defensiveness and denial are strong currents running through the recent literature on men by men. Fear of change. Denial, as in the denial that patriarchy exists or denial around the issue of violence - as we have just seen. Nuala O'Faoláin asks men, and with some justification, "wouldn't you think that men would welcome the advances some women have made?" What is disappointing most of all about the public debate is its adversarial nature, is the unwillingness to listen to the experiences of the other and the other includes the experiences of women and the voices of men who do not conform to the siege mentality.

In following the debate over the last three years, I have been struck by the comparisons between those who deny patriarchy, who now portray men as victims, and other dominant forces that are having difficulty coming to terms with change. The Anti-Agreement Unionists in Northern Ireland, or the minority of Whites in South Africa who still refuse to accept a multi-racial society are cases in point, as indeed are members of the Likud party in Israel. Listening to the Anti-Agreement Unionists and, indeed, to some Pro-Agreement Unionists, one gets the impression that they believe that there never was a problem with civil rights in Northern Ireland for Catholics and Nationalists. The first public acknowledgement came from David Trimble in his Nobel Peace Prize Address, when he said that the North was "a cold house for Catholics", a minimalist enough recognition in the circumstances. Equally, it has to be said that Irish society was a cold house for Irish women, and men were the gatekeepers of that house. It is important for men to

recognise this and to state it. It is in this context, then, that the issue of the position of men should be addressed.

For men I think it is important to recognise that even if we don't support patriarchal structures that we are beneficiaries of it – there is such a thing as the patriarchal dividend. It accrues to all men, even those who are marginalised because of their sexual orientation, ethnicity, disability, ill-health or social class. Arising from that recognition and acknowledgement should come a resolve to contribute to the dismantling of patriarchy and a concomitant resolve to pursue more power-sharing relationships.

And if power-sharing is to be achieved it means that we have to become less defensive, more open and more willing to listen, more proactive in supporting our women partners in the home; ensuring what Harry Ferguson calls "domestic democracy" in Changing Fathers?, the book he co-authored with Kieran McKeown and Kieran Rooney, is not just an aspiration but a full blooded reality. And ensuring that our women colleagues in the workplace are actually treated as equal partners, and when they are left lagging behind, as they are in most public areas of life, that men actively become involved in ensuring that the horizontal and vertical impediments to progression are undermined.

It is also important that women are not left with the emotional workload, people men turn to when we need support, but that men are available to provide that emotional support to women too and to other men. If acknowledgement of men's dominant role in society is the starting point, then the concerns and scepticism of many women alluded to at the outset of this paper may very well begin to dissipate.

I think it is important to state that men who are interested in moving on from old models of society are not themselves responsible for the construction of patriarchy, but such men must ensure that we are not responsible for its maintenance or its reproduction. And that is difficult. Power sharing, as the unionists in Northern Ireland and the Whites in South Africa have come to realise, is a painful experience. If power sharing is to be achieved, it will involve making painful decisions for men. The pain may very well include withdrawing from personal, social, political and promotional advancement to facilitate the advancement of women who made such sacrifices in the past for the men and children in their lives. To put it bluntly, how many men would forego their own personal advancement for the sake of their women partners or women colleagues in a kind of voluntary positive discrimination?

Rather than wait passively within the walls of the citadel, men's and women's interests would both benefit if each were to join with the other in taking down the bricks one by one. In this new setting, the pressing issues that many men face, like high levels of suicide, violence of all sorts, substance use/misuse, poor literacy, homelessness, early mortality, unemployment and poverty, can be tackled in a refreshing way. In this way men can begin, as Nuala O'Faoláin suggested almost a decade ago, to "take responsibility for his brothers" and, in the process of doing so, contribute not only to the liberation of women,

(which is not to argue that the liberation of women is dependent on the goodwill of men, in the same way that the liberation of the Black people of South Africa were not dependent on the White people for their liberation), but to our own liberation as well.

It is on the level of consciousness that change must come. Self-education, school and community education are keys to overcoming denial and beginning the process of power sharing. Some of this work has started both in the formal second and third level, some in the informal sector. Much remains to be done.

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Appendix 4:
Full Text of Alan O'Neill's Speech

This conference is about celebrating difference. Firstly I want to celebrate some sameness. Some of what you will read in the excellent report now issued by AONTAS is quotes from interviews with men. These men are from the South East Men's Network, from men's groups in the south-east and from other men's groups around the country. You'll read some of these men echoing the same sort of sentiments as the women in the video we have watched, "Invisible Movement". To identify these samenesses, and the differences, it is well worth a read.

I'm going to talk generally. I'm going to talk about men. This doesn't mean that anything I say isn't also applicable to women: some of our experiences are shared. As I have said, there are some samenesses. However my job is with men and it is from that perspective that I will talk.

The slides you can see on the screen behind me are from our web-site www.mens-network.net. The first slide describes us and this information is outlined on the flyer that we have made available today. I will use these slides as a guide to this talk.

The South East Men's Network is promoting change for men. The saddest events that have happened on this island have been when men decide to go out and change each other's minds by putting a bullet into each other's minds. You can't get more changed than that. That is how extreme it gets when men have lost touch with themselves and with each other. Many of us may have mixed feelings about these shootings because they are, or were in the past, associated with liberation: national liberation and unionist liberation, depending on which tradition you come from. The book "Loyalism" describes a Protestant working class man and how he took his best friend, a Catholic, out for a drive. They had been best friends from a young age. He shot his best friend because he had seen his other friend, a protestant librarian, shot the night before. When he had done this he felt like he had ripped his own heart out of his chest. If he had been able to realise this effect when contemplating the deed he would have his friend alive today.

The people in Co-operation Ireland are interested in the work that we are doing because we want men to work together for change. If we men changed our attitude to violence it would have huge implications for peace on this island. The S.E.M.N. may not be able to affect this change but we hope to have some influence on its happening. It is important for all of us that it does happen both for our safety and in order that we can live in a peace.

The S.E.M.N. employs four staff members; Liam Bolger, and David Whelan and I are here with our Chairman, John O'Rourke. Our administrator Michael Hennessy is holding the fort back at 3 Barrack St., Waterford. Michael is with us because of a piece of work we did about four years ago in Waterford where we teamed up with Waterford Regional Youth Service and they brought

together 12 young men, between the ages of 14 and 16 who had noticeable skills and abilities. We ran a leadership course with them for 10 weeks.

The first evening I looked a young man in the eye. Apparently that meant that I was gay, and he wasn't going to stay around. This incident will give you some idea of the level of fear that men have of being close or vulnerable with each other, and of support. I was offering support and he feared that I was coming on to him in some way. All I did was look at him. Wonderful news though; this year he has come back into youth work after five years. Michael, on the other hand, finished the course and is now our administrator. He is doing a business studies training course and hopes to continue in that direction.

The S.E.M.N. runs the Men's Development Project. We work with about ten groups in the region in any year. The key thing is, and some of the women in the video said the same, that we, John, David, Liam, Michael and I have all come through the Men's Development process ourselves. Rather than meet with men and say that we think they should do this or that, we are able to say that we have done this ourselves, it has been useful to us and we want to share it with you. We don't ask any men to do what we haven't done ourselves.

This is important. It is highlighted in the example given in the AONTAS report "Men on the Move" by Toni Owens in the case of another project, the Newbridge V.T.O.S. Scheme. In this scheme, as I understand it, they brought in a psychologist to work with the men attending the course on their self-esteem. They had the psychologist join in. He took part in the course so that he could understand what the men were going through and so that he could share and show some of himself. My guess is that he is probably a middle class professional like myself, so I can understand how difficult that would be for him. His training would have been pressing on him to sound like he knows what he is talking about all the time and not to show any vulnerability. His job may well include asking others to show some vulnerability. The S.E.M.N is very much in the business of sharing and building an equality where, no matter what your background, you share what your life is really like.

The men's groups we are working with at the moment are in various locations around the south-east. We have two groups in Waterford: adult men and young men. The adult men's group is a mixture of middle class and working class men. The young men's group is a youth diversion project that David has just started work with. There is a group in Carrick-on-Suir. Albert Nolan is heading up the group in Knockenrawley in Tipperary town. Gerry Mitchell has a very successful group in Nenagh, Co. Tipperary. We are doing a training course there on running men's development groups. We have one each in Kilkenny and Carlow and we work with two in Wexford. One of these is a group for men with disabilities. Part of our approach is that men who share particular life experiences form a group together to build solidarity with each other first, then move from there into the other groups.

The next slide on our web-site is a description of our Men's Development Project. The target group is all men because we want to build a sense of co-operation and support for each other no matter who the men are, or the man is. We run various events. Our main national event is the Men's Summer School, which usually happens at the end of May. This gives us the opportunity to share our way of working with men and men's groups from around the country. There are about 200 men's groups in Ireland. We have a ways to go to catch up with the 1000 women's groups, but women are at a different place and are more established. The event also gives us a chance to network. There are at least two men's groups from Dublin represented at this AONTAS conference: Christy Fleming from Ballymun Men's Centre is here, as is Richard McDermott from the Liberties Men's Group. We are delighted when these men's groups come to our summer school and we can work together.

The next slide from our website shows the aim and the objectives of the Men's Development Project:

The Aim

The aim of the Project is to achieve change in men, by men and with men, so that all men have better and more meaningful lives in a society that understands men's humanity. The long-term effect of achieving this goal will be better and more meaningful lives for men, women and young people, in a more humane society.

The Objectives

The South East Men's Network runs the Men's Development Project to:

- Engage with men about the issues that arise in our lives.
- Assist men who are experiencing disadvantages due to unemployment, marginalisation, poverty, or men's conditioning, to overcome these disadvantages.
- Develop inclusiveness, equality and understanding among men.
- Explain what we know of the cultural and societal conditioning of men and check the soundness of our analysis against individual men's experience.
- Work with men to tackle the issues and the conditioning.
- Support men attempting to deal with change.
- Build confidence, self-esteem and self-respect in men.
- Empower men to build good relationships with themselves, each other, their partners, families, children, community and society.
- Train men to develop leadership, facilitative and co-operative skills.
- Have men take responsibility.
- Achieve change in men, by men and with men, and therefore in society.

I will only be able to deal with some of these objectives, but I hope that the following examples will give you a sense of the work we do, how we do it and what we are aiming to achieve.

Engaging with men

We like to say that there is no demand but there is a huge need. Men are not rushing to be in men's development groups. It's hard to get men in. We travel to resource centres, family resource centres, parish centres, parish halls, community centres, community development projects. We ask them if they have a plan and if so are men mentioned in it and if they are, can we come and meet with them? Men are often mentioned in plans these days but when we started out five years ago they were found under "the unemployed", not "men". At that time there were 33,000 unemployed men in the south-east. That is now down to 10,000. Plenty of men to work with and give support to.

The reality of the situation was that we often ended up sitting in cold parish halls and nobody would turn up. And we would start the whole process again. A key part of getting a men's development group going can be working with women. The centres we call into are usually staffed by and have been set up by women and have become a safe place for women. Some of these women have been good allies to us.

The reality is that women love men. This is the good news. Most women are in relationships with men and have fathers, brothers, and sons that they love dearly. Despite whatever differences that might arise from time to time they love these men and want the best for them. What we have noticed works well is when a woman encourages a man to go to a men's development group. The woman can say that there is a chance for him to do some men's development work, there is going to be an introductory meeting at such a time in the centre, and how she would love him to go. She can also tell him that she thinks that he is a good man, and whatever it is that she has noticed about him and how he is as a man e.g. how he is with children or at the community meetings. She can tell him that she thinks he would have a good contribution to make. We are not asking women to tell lies. If it's true he'll love it. Any man will love having affirmed what is true about him.

If I ask him he may respond by saying yes and he may attend and that will be perfect. But alternatively the homophobia may come up for him. He may say yes and not appear on the night. Being asked and encouraged by a woman helps to avoid this happening. So women can be allies to men and a support to them. After our introductory meeting we might not be back for a week, two weeks, or a month. The men who signed up may experience doubts in the meantime:

- "What did I go to that for?"
- "What's that all about?"
- "It sounds a bit weird."

When this happens, women in the centres where the meeting is scheduled to take place can support the men to go back to the next meeting and to keep going.

Assisting men

One major effect of disadvantage is the effect that it has on a man's self-esteem and self-confidence. The first thing to say to a man affected this way is that it is not his fault and that it has not made him less of a man. Talk to him about the conditioning of men. This conditioning is reinforced by the celebration of successful men that we see going on in the media; in magazines, on T.V.; on the Late Late Show for instance. Men who have earned a lot of money or who are successful creatively and who have the expensive car and the house, and associate with female super-models, and all that sort of cliché. We can dismiss it as cliché if we want to, but working with unemployed men you will find that this is a value system that they recognise and are not part of. Their self-esteem and self-confidence is affected because they feel unsuccessful in this society that celebrates success. They also say that they feel as if the eyes of their partners and children are on them saying, "You are not a success". Of course they know that this is not actually happening. But there is a sense of having internalised this devaluation, the sense of not being valuable as a man.

Developing inclusiveness, equality and understanding about men from all classes, backgrounds, and abilities

We invite men to share and there is an important aspect to this. I've talked about people being open no matter what background they are from. Sharing has implications, especially if you are a man with access to more resources that others. There is a reflective realisation to be made when this man shares with men who are disadvantaged, unemployed or poor. The question he needs to ask himself may be how come most of the resources are stacked up at this end where I can get the benefit of them and these guys can't? He needs to look at how the society maintains economic inequality.

One of the things we did when Toni Owens rang us from AONTAS to ask us to contribute to the research for this report was to ask her how much we were going to be paid. In the end we made a deal and there was a fee paid. W e encourage all groups in Community Development to look for a share of the research organisation's resources. We encourage all researchers when looking for funding to look for equal resources for the groups that are taking part in the research. Make sure that you have allowed for this payment in your research budget. We do this because the men's stories are very valuable. There would be no research result without the men's stories. With any group being researched there is no result if the questions aren't answered. In our case we wanted the men, their stories and the time that they were giving to be valued. If you ask someone to sit down for an hour and answer your questions they are working for you for an hour. We think the men should be paid for that hour's work. We made the same arrangement with U.C.C. a couple of years ago and that research should published next year.

Working with men to tackle the issues and the conditioning and supporting men who are attempting to change

Starting off
The process that the S.E.M.N uses is a developmental one. Initially a man comes into a men's group and starts talking or not. Men who come in the first day may talk for three minutes if you are lucky. If five men turn up your meeting could be over in 15 minutes. If you have made the welcoming speech you may have stretched the meeting to half an hour. So you will need lots and lots of patience. In our experience it takes about two years for a men's group, meeting maybe once a week with a couple of months break in the summer, to get established and to really feel like they are on their way.

One thing that we all know about is our lives and our families. To encourage men to talk you can ask:

- What has your life been like?
- Where are you from?
- Where were you born?
- Who did you grow up with?
- Where did you go to school?
- Tell us about your parents, family, and community both then and now.
- What is your situation now?

This is something that anyone can talk about and we all know the questions to ask. We can keep adding questions. People often say that men don't talk. You need to get us onto something that we can talk about and ask us questions about it.

For instance ask us who our heroes are. We have loads of historical, political and sporting heroes. I always think of Roy Keane. I think he is absolutely gorgeous. Right now he is at the top of his profession and getting loads of publicity. He grew up in a local authority house in Cork City. At the age of 14 or 15 he wrote to every premiership club in England except Man. United because he thought they were the only club that would be too good for him! He asked for a trial and he got one with Nottingham Forest, got a job and went on from there. He is a model of a man who fulfilled his potential. We try and hold out that sense of potential for each man.

Some of the Issues

Emotion
One of the biggest issues for men is emotion. Anytime that men show emotion with laughter, tears, shaking, sweating, going red etc. we are indicating the ways that we haven't really been allowed to be vulnerable. In general growing up we had to be tough. There are obvious reasons why we have to be tough. If you are a 10 year old boy on your own in Waterford or even before you are 10 you'll probably have already been held up at knife point at least once by other boys. So you need to know that it is tough out there. What you will also need is safe places where you can express your fears and talk about these

tough experiences and the load that being tough puts on you. Maybe you were able to handle the incident when it happened but what was it like afterwards. The challenge is to create the safety for boys, young men, and adult men to admit the effects of the conditioning on us and the effects of events like that on us.

Educational Disadvantage
Recent research found that 60% of men who were long term unemployed had left school by the age of 12. Unemployed men who come into our groups would have similar stories. They would say that they were encouraged to leave school. Imagine a guy at twelve who is told he is useless, that he should go else where, that there is no point in him staying in school, and that he should go find a job. What do you do when this happens you at 12? I don't know. That's the sort of information that men tell us about how they left education The situation at home at the time maybe wasn't so good. There was no support from there and no possibility of it in the future. Thus it is not to blame any one. Every body was doing their best under the circumstances.

Let me give you an example of one man who, after leaving primary school, managed to get into the Tech in his town, despite being told that he was useless and that there was no point. He was dressed in second-hand clothes and felt terrible. He saw other pupils with their new bags and new books when he had nothing and he got angry and went for them. He became a problem in the school so they threw him out for attacking other pupils. He was so jealous and envious, and so angry that there was nothing for him. He carried his anger onto the street and continued to attack his peers throughout his teenage years starting fights around the town with other young men. He'll tell you this himself. He wound up in court and a probation officer stood up for him. If she hadn't he was on his way to prison.

When this man is attending the development group he could be asked a number of useful questions:

- Who ever supported you during your life?
- Was there a turning point for you?
- Was there a time in your life when even for a moment you realised you were worth it?

The man in our example would tell you that it was the time the probation officer vouched for him. She also told him that her door was always open to him anytime day or night. He never knocked on that door. It was enough that he knew it was there. It was a wonderful offer for his probation officer to make.

Self-esteem and self-confidence
We are developmental. Men come into a group. It runs for two years. Then we suggest to men in that group that they run one of our Men's Regional Days with the support and co-operation of the network staff. This is an opportunity for these men to try out their new-found confidence which, hopefully, has built up over the two years. Of course they are very fearful about doing this. We work with that group of men to organise the event. They learn skills of

organisation, planning, consciousness raising, identifying issues and how to address them, programming, publicising, arranging the venue, the food and the child care, costing the whole lot and evaluating the process and the outcome. So one event provides many learning opportunities.

When a man gets up to talk at the regional day he may be purple or ashen faced with fear or embarrassment. He may be shaking out and saying I don't want to do this. But after he has stood up there in front of thirty men for 5 to 10 minutes talking about himself, his life and his men's group and what it has meant to him he will find that he has started to rebuild his self confidence. These are the building blocks of self-confidence. After this experience he has gained one block. When I started out in 1982 I could never have talked in front of people like I am doing here this evening. But because I and others can do it now we have expectations that other men will get to this point in their own time and with our encouragement and support they will say that they will go for it. We'll be there on the day that he does, right beside him supporting him all the way whatever men's group he is in.

Gender equality

We make a distinction in our work between thinking and feeling and then we look to men to make a connection. For example, a man comes to a group. He is unemployed. He is isolated at home. His wife is working. Some of his children are at home and some are at school. He is angry and frustrated. He says, "Women are getting everything these days". He is stating his issue straight out. It is an equality issue.

"They are taking our work" he says, "I'm stuck at home with the kids and she wants me to cook". He has childcare and housework issues as well.

He says, "I feel awful". Now we have his feelings as well.

The first thing we do is listen to this man and we encourage him to 'put it all out' his anger, his isolation, his frustration; all his feelings about his situation and his wife's. What we have noticed is that if you don't get the feelings out of the way you won't be able to think clearly about your situation. If you can't think clearly, you won't be able to make a connection with your gut about what you really want and how you are going to work towards getting it. One way we could suggest to this man to look at this issue would be to examine social history in a light sort of a way. We could ask him to look at what women have got.

Following this proposal we find that women have got the vote. Very good, that's a start. They have some access to development, education and work. They have the right to compete for jobs. The right to equal pay which they may or may not be getting. They have available contraception. Childcare isn't sorted yet. At this point you and he will start running out of things that women have got and see that some things aren't sorted yet. There are still the issues of sexism, pornography, violence, these major issues that women want sorted that haven't been sorted.

Now you and this man have established what it is that women have got and also that they haven't got everything. In addition lots of women are getting work that a man wouldn't do. He would consider that some of the work that women are doing is not men's work.

Recent reports have highlighted that employers like employing women because they are flexible, hard working, malleable, unorganised (not unionised) and they are thankful, quiet, and don't complain. This is a generalisation of course but these may be reasons for women to get more radical once more.

So we are listening to this man. We have given the feelings some time to be aired so that the anger and frustration have moved out of the man enough for him to start thinking. Notwithstanding our potted social history, in relation to "women getting everything these days", we might ask him:

" Why do you think this is so? He says " Maybe its feminism... That's it she's turned into a feminist". "Is she a feminist?" "No, but her friend is, and her friend brought her down to that meeting you know. When she went down to the centre she did the personal development first, then she went back to education and now she is on the C.D.P. committee. She's out every night of the week and I'm at home with the children."

The trouble with being at home with the children is that the men's conditioning says that this is women's work and, secondly, it is under valued work and therefore I, as a man, feel terrible doing it. Nobody values this work and I want to be valued. I'm feeling terrible about my situation anyway. I'm going to be slagged by my friends because I'm at home with my children. In addition I feel like I don't have the skills for this work.

It's worth making a distinction here. There is lots of talk about the changing roles for men being such a challenge for men. I think that it is the lack of skills for the new roles that is the difficulty for men not the change itself. Either we don't have the skills required by the new role or we feel we don't have them. We may fear that we won't know how to look after our children, won't know how to care for them, or how to run a household. It's the skills bit that we have the trouble with as well as the feeling of being devalued.

So this is what this man says about his wife. We check with him what nights he goes out. He goes out drinking on Friday and Saturday nights and Tuesday night is snooker night. Saturday and Sunday depending on the weather and the season he is going out hunting with the lads, the dogs, and the guns. We check this in order to get a balance of reality into the exchange.

Now here is an opportunity to celebrate men's skills. A man can put a couple of pheasants or rabbits on the table for Sunday dinner. Lots of men are good at this and know about hunting, shooting, and fishing. Lots of men feel very much at home in the countryside, with animals, guns and dogs.

Having got this far with this man it is time to start making connections. By way of a review it's worth restating the situation as established so far. This is what your wife is doing and because she is doing that and other women are doing similar things women are starting to get some of what they want. They are starting to make better lives for themselves in this society.

Now ask him what other women there are in his family along with his wife. Does he have a sister, a daughter, a mother, as well as a wife? Does he want a better life for his daughter? Any man will say "Yes I do" straight away. It will touch his heart straight away like it is hitting mine now and he will say "Yes I do". Once he can make this connection he will say the same for his sister, his mother, and his wife.

The questions then are:

- How will you support them to achieve better lives?
- What are the obstacles that are in the way?
- Are you one of the obstacles and if so how can you move your self and the obstacles that you are putting up?
- What do they and you need to do next to achieve their goals?

Now he is starting to think as a responsible, thoughtful, loving, and supportive, father, husband, son, or brother.

The fact that he raised the gender issue at all is a gift and can now lead into the next stage of this work which is to ask him what sort of life he wants for himself and to go through exactly the same process. He has an analogy now and he has had the experience of going through the process and he can connect with his love for himself and his family. He could be asked the same series of questions about his son. "What sort of life do you want for your son?" It is useful for men to look at how we want life to be for our own young men growing up and what we need to change in ourselves and other men so that the next generation of men can have safer and fuller lives. When we reflect on this we can get an idea of how it might be for ourselves right now.

- What sort of life do you want for yourself?
- How are you going to get it?
- What are the obstacles in the way?
- What is the next step you need to take or next move you need to make?

One man reports that after each men's group meeting he goes home to his wife who is watching telly and he says " Would you like a cup of tea? She says that she would love one. He goes and makes the cup of tea and serves it up to her and at that moment he loves her unconditionally. Maybe for an hour or an hour and a half after the men's group he can stay connected to his love for her. However the reality is that peoples lives are hard. The oppressive forces on this couple come from the hard lives that each of them and their children are having and the struggle they have with poverty, unemployment and low paid jobs. All of this negative stuff starts weaving its way through the family undoing the strength of the connections between them. Other

pressures add to the effect, including the conditioning, other men saying come out to the pub, and other attractions away from the family. All of these make it hard for a man to stay connected.

As the process that I have outlined here is practised more and more it is easier to stay connected. It's easier to remind oneself of who you love what you want for them and what you want for yourself.

Embarrassment
I have already said that emotions are a big issue for men. Embarrassment is the feeling that affects all of them in a way. It's probably seems easy to ask in this time of the Celtic Tiger "Why don't unemployed men go out and get a job? Why doesn't he join a men's' development group and get his embarrassment sorted out?" If he does go against his fears and join a men's development group he has already taken a big step. But let me tell you a story of one man's struggle with embarrassment and why its not so easy to just go out and get a job.

Having said what he wanted to do in the group this man's challenge was to go out and get a job in garage, and then he would be put on a Fás scheme. He knew there was a job in a particular garage. He walked up and down outside that garage for an hour on a Saturday. He could see the guy inside in the garage that he needed to talk to. He could see that man all the way across that expanse of concrete paving brick that they use on garage forecourts these days. But he couldn't step over the kerb between the public footpath and the forecourt. He couldn't lift his foot to step over it. Later when we asked him why, he said that he was too embarrassed.

He brought his difficulty back to the men's development group and worked on his embarrassment and fear week in and week out. He told us of how he felt outside that forecourt, how he had been embarrassed before, what it had been like and who had embarrassed him. He told as many stories as he could remember or had time for. He expressed as much of the feeling of embarrassment as he could. Then he went and did it. He went and stepped onto the forecourt even though he was still embarrassed. That was the shift that he had made. That although he was still embarrassed, he was connected enough to himself and his self-worth to be able to value himself despite his feelings and step over the kerb and walk in even though he was shaking out as he did it.

To finish off ...a really important bit

That is to remind men how good we are. (I notice your laughter). This morning when Peadar King reminded us of what appears in the papers about men. He described all the bad reports on page after page. As an antidote to this lets look around the room here, look at the chair you are sitting on, think of what you had for lunch, the transport you came here in, etc. I don't want to grab all the kudos for men but virtually every bit of it was thought of, designed, and built by men.

Let's look at the walls of this room. This always moves me. Think of the concrete blocks that these walls are made of. Did you ever lift a concrete block? Block-layers can lift and lay 400 blocks a day. That is 2000 a week, and that is 100,000 per year. What are they doing when they lift and lay a concrete block, make sure that it is plumb, that it bonds to the next block with the mortar, that it is solid and sound, that the insulation fits tightly to the outside of the inner block, and that it all ties in together? These men are making sure that we are warm here, that this building stays up, that it houses us in comfort, and that it works for us, whether it's a hall like this one or our house at home. When you are warm in your house at home think of the guy who got up on a scaffold on a January day. He had to wait until 11.00 o'clock until it had thawed to 3 or 4 degrees which is the temperature that he could start laying mortar at. The frost is still on the scaffolding, it doesn't go, and it stays there all day. So it's fairly dicey up there. He's laying blocks in that weather.

That's how loving and caring men are.

Fortunately for society men are able to do things like this. But we are pulled away from our families to build for all families and we have to work hard doing this. It is useful that we are pulled away from our families because it allows for our society to continue and to develop because of the work that we do. But we have to sacrifice some of our connection to our families and to our selves. Block-layers get worn out, they give their lives to the work and they shorten their lives by doing it. How many years can a man lift that number of blocks for? Men die younger because we do work like this. This is the truth of our situation. This is a very serious situation for men. But it is caring work.

Think also of the food you ate today. Farmers are mostly men. They go out in all sorts of weathers to grow and prepare that food for us. This is also men being caring.

The last thing I want to say to you is this: Ailbhe Smyth and Peadar King both mentioned liberation and freedom in their talks here this morning. Through the work of Liam Bolger we have recently been included in the Educational Equality Initiative. Next year we will be able to offer educational opportunities to the men who are part of our Men's Development Project.

Equality is a worthy goal. But to my mind it is a first step. In one of the examples I gave you about working with men I mentioned how far women had got. But women haven't got all the way yet and men have got a good bit to go to get to where women are.

It's really liberation that we should be talking about. At the end of the day, what is our society going to be like and how are we going to share the resources? How are we going to make it humane for all of us? I think that the ultimate goal of the South East Men's Network is Men's Liberation.

Luckily, the liberation of one group in isolation is impossible. The only way that liberation will be successful for men, is when it includes the liberation of women and young people.

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